



Making a Difference in Iraq

Kim Polk

Each day we wake up to images and stories from Iraq. When we turn on the news, we see car bombs, gunfire, missiles, violence and destruction, but we also witness the smiles of Iraqi children and selfless service from our military men and women. Many of us catch ourselves asking the questions that most of us cannot answer. What's it really like to be in Iraq? Is it truly that dangerous? How does one protect oneself from mortars, gunfire and bombs? Can we truly make a difference? What is it like to live in those conditions, and do the images we see on television really reflect the actual situation over there?

Butch Wentworth, U.S. Army Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate's Special Products and Prototyping Division, stands outside his office in Balad, Iraq. Wentworth volunteered for a 6-month tour in Iraq because he wanted to support our Soldiers directly. (U.S. Army photo by Butch Wentworth.)

Butch Wentworth, U.S. Army Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate's (NVESD's) Special Products and Prototyping Division, can tell you all about it. He volunteered for a 6-month tour in Iraq that started in December 2004. To start his adventure, Wentworth went through some rather intense training to prepare for the conditions in which he would be living and working. I recently interviewed Wentworth and got a whole lot more than answers. I was inspired by his willingness to take a chance, his loyalty to Soldiers and his dedication to the mission. Guess what? He is making a difference!

I think everyone wants to support our troops in one way or another. We all do it in different ways, and I prefer to have a face-to-face interaction with the troops.

Q. Tell us what made you decide to go to Iraq considering the danger involved?

A. Everyone asks that question and, for me, it makes me feel like I made a difference for the troops. I think everyone wants to support our troops in one way or another. We all do it in different ways, and I prefer to have a face-to-face interaction with the troops.

Q. You were trained at Fort Bliss, TX. What did that involve?

A. Shots, lots of shots. You get a medical and dental exam. You attend lots of briefings to get you prepared for what it's like in Iraq. You learn about the different religious sects and their customs. You take battlefield first aid classes consisting of treating wounds from bullets, shrapnel, burns and chemical contamination. It's not your everyday first aid. You are issued three duffle bags of clothing, a sleeping bag and Kevlar®/body armor.

Q. Were you trained to protect yourself?

A. Just common sense stuff like keeping your head down. They teach you how to use a chemical protective mask, and you get a force protection briefing that is geared to the threat in Iraq.

Q. Do you carry a weapon?

A. I'm authorized to carry a weapon but I prefer not to. I have 20,000 heavily armed Soldiers around me, so I don't feel the need for one. When I go to the Forward Observation Post, it's a different story. I might consider carrying one depending on the threat. I have qualified on the 9mm and the M16 here in Balad.

Q. Once you arrived in Iraq, how did you get to your work site?

A. Don Mumma picked me up at the Balad airport. He works out of the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC)

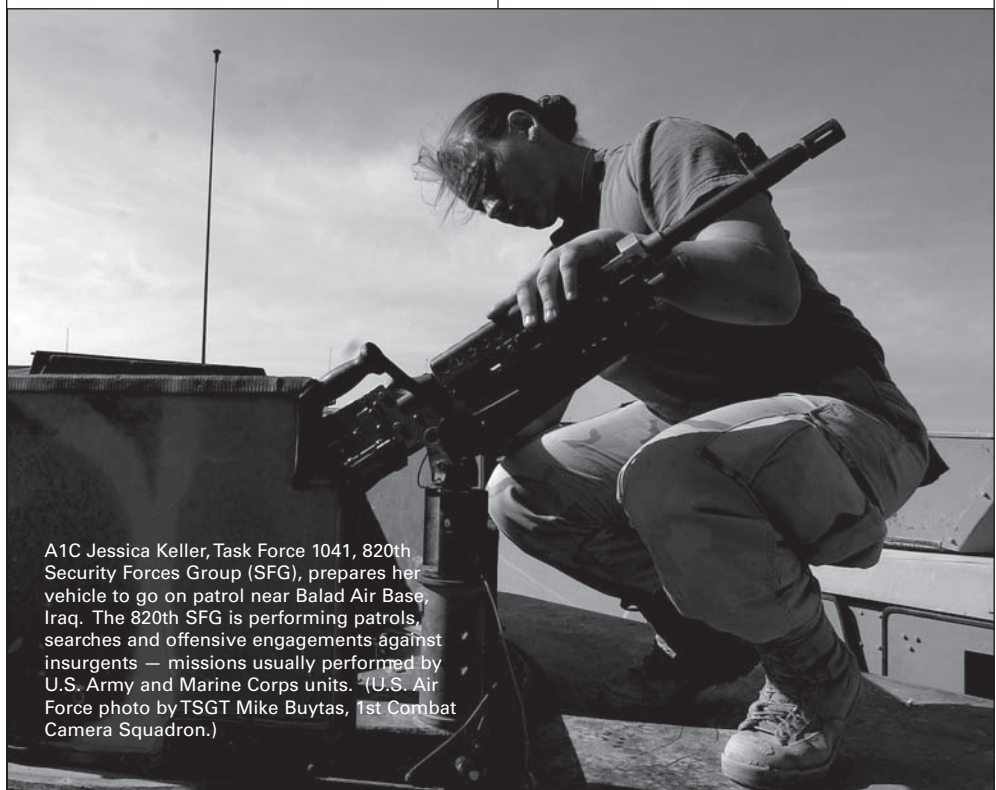
Headquarters building as the Communications-Electronics Command's Senior Command Representative. He gave me a quick tour of the base and introduced me to various commanders and their staffs. He also gave me keys to my vehicle and office. Basically, my first day was meeting all of the Forward Repair Activity (FRA) personnel, whom I came here to manage.

Q. Are you protected?

A. My office has sandbags and T-walls to protect me from mortar and rocket attacks. T-walls are cement barriers that are about 4-feet wide, 10-feet high and 14-inches thick. We get a lot of incoming [mortar attacks] here in Balad.

Q. What's the average temperature in Iraq?

A. At night, it gets real cold. This morning, we woke up to ice on the ground. During the day when the sun is out, it gets up to about 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit. It's the rainy season here now, and when it rains, it makes everything a big muddy mess.



A1C Jessica Keller, Task Force 1041, 820th Security Forces Group (SFG), prepares her vehicle to go on patrol near Balad Air Base, Iraq. The 820th SFG is performing patrols, searches and offensive engagements against insurgents — missions usually performed by U.S. Army and Marine Corps units. (U.S. Air Force photo by TSGT Mike Buytas, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.)




A1C Rebekah Deliz, 332nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron (ESFS), delivers shoes to Iraqi citizens in a village near Balad Air Base, Iraq, Feb. 18, 2005. The 332nd ESFS received more than 1,150 pairs of shoes donated by individual Americans and U.S. businesses. (U.S. Air Force photo by TSGT Mike Buytas, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.)

Q. What are the conditions like where you work?

A. It's noisy. We are powered by generators and they run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are next to the Air Force runway and it's pretty active here. When F-16s take off they are extremely loud and they shake my office building. The dirt gets into everything. It's like talcum power — it gets in your hair, nose and clothes.

Q. Tell us about your average day in Iraq.

A. I live and work out of my office. I am the only one who lives on the FRA compound; everyone else lives across the street in personnel trailers. I prepare a pot of coffee at 0700 and start reading and answering my e-mails. I



LTC Robert Cody, Commander, 118th Medical Battalion, Connecticut Army National Guard, visits the construction site for a new medical clinic in Anwar Village, Iraq. His medical unit supports 13th Corps Support Command headquartered at Logistical Supply Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by SGT David E. Gillespie.)

am responsible for the daily personnel accountability, which I report to our S-1 by 0800. I am responsible for keeping this place operational. I think I am the complaint department. I can authorize on-the-spot repairs to some unsupported items, such as repairing broken cables. The FRA personnel who work here are 100-percent supportive to Soldiers' needs. Balad receives mortar and rocket attacks about 3 days a week. After each attack, I am responsible for conducting personnel accountability and reporting it to the S-1 within 15 minutes after the "all clear" is sounded. I have personnel in Mosul, Tikrit, Balad and Baghdad. I am currently preparing the FRAs in Balad, Tikrit and Baghdad for growth in personnel and mission support, which includes making work/office space and

life support for additional personnel. My typical day ends at midnight.

Q. Are you allowed to travel within Iraq?

A. The only way to travel is by military convoy or by air. There are no safe areas in Iraq, so traveling is for business only. I've been to Tikrit once since I've been here.

Q. Tell me about your living conditions — eating, sleeping and working.

A. The dining facility food is good. I am comfortable with my workspace and sleeping quarters.

I do think that most Iraqis wanted a change here. The worst thing is watching the MEDEVAC helicopters fly overhead. Iraq's main hospital is here in Balad.

Q. When you are not working, what kind of recreation and relaxation, such as TV or movies, are available?

A. Yeah right! Although the Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities are available for us to use, there really isn't any time. They have pool tables, game rooms, a library and a movie room. They also have karaoke on some nights. There is a Burger

King®, Pizza Hut® and Subway® here, but I haven't had time to visit them yet. I do have TV, and I can receive CNN and ESPN from the Armed Forces Network.

Q. Are there shops close by for personal purchases?

A. Yes, there are a few shops on base where you can buy souvenirs.

Q. What is the best thing you can think of about Iraq and what is the worst?

A. Sounds like a political question here, and I don't want to talk about politics — that's best left to our politicians. I do think that most Iraqis wanted a change here. The worst thing is watching the MEDEVAC helicopters fly overhead. Iraq's main hospital is here in Balad.

Q. Do you hear explosions constantly?

A. All the time. We hear incoming, outgoing and controlled explosions.

Q. If you could have anything you wanted that you can't get in Iraq, what would it be?

A. Starbucks coffee beans, doormats, 4-foot by 5-foot carpets and stiff-bristle cleaning brushes. We track a lot of mud into our office areas.

Q. If you get sick, what process do you go through to see a doctor or get medicine?



CPL Mike King scans for insurgents while PFC Brian Healy (far left) and SSG Jamie Goheens search for weapons caches near Balad, Iraq. These Soldiers are assigned to the 108th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Abel Trevino.)

A. We just go to sick call.

Q. How has this experience changed your life?

A. It won't really change my life. I know what I am doing and why I am here. I knew what to expect before I came here.

Q. Is there anything you would like to add?

A. AMC is looking for volunteers to come here. If you sign up, be prepared to deal with all I talked about. The danger is real and the hours are long. However, the reward you get is the satisfaction of making a Soldier's day a little better.



Soldiers, Airmen and Marines are making a big difference every day in the lives of Iraqi citizens. Here, a Soldier tries to comfort a frightened child near Balad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo.)

KIM POLK is a Program Integration Specialist at NVESD. She is currently working toward a bachelor's degree in business at Strayer University. Kim supports the lab in the protocol arena.

